

National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board Minutes
Phoenix, AZ

April 7-8, 2003

Board members present: Robin Lohnes, Bill Higham, Brent Eldridge, Wayne Burkhardt, Richard Sewing. Washington Office and BLM staff: Fran Cherry, Ed Shepard, Bud Cribley, Don Glenn, Sally Hampton, Dean Bolstad, Ron Hall; Elaine Zilenski and Kelly Grissom, AZ. APHIS: Lisa Hatcher and Al Kane.

Robin Lohnes, Co-Chair opened the meeting at 8:05 a.m., April 7, 2003.

She introduced the Advisory Board members, Fran Cherry, and Ed Shepard to the public in attendance.

Fran Cherry expressed his concern and the Director's concern about the Wild Horse and Burro Program. It has taken so long to get leadership in place. They are in the process of selecting the Wild Horse and Burro Group Manager and selection will be made by the end of April, 2003. The selection will be in time for the Wild Horse and Burro Steering Committee meeting which may be the week of April 28, 2003. They had received 14 applicants for the position. Once the selection has been made, it will take 60 day before the new Group Manager comes aboard. Fran and the Director fully support the role of the Advisory Board. They have worked hard to get the nominations for the Board cleared, which could be sometime today or tomorrow. Fran expressed concern that BLM will have a flat budget for the next three or four years. He also noted that in management models BLM had not anticipated such factors as prolonged drought, fire issues and budget issues. The Director and Fran are charging the Advisory Board to consider things BLM could do "outside of the box", including direct sale, new adoption techniques, and to take a fresh look outside of BLM's purview. Fran noted that BLM will make some changes. He will become actively involved with the Steering Committee. He will work to ensure the Steering Committee takes a national view of the program and focus in on actions that are in the best interest of the Bureau. The Advisory Board liaison will attend the Steering Committee meeting. Fran charged the Board to take another look at the fertility program. Managers are getting impatient with the progress of this program. Fran presented Gary Zakotnik with an award for his outstanding work he has done for the Board. Awards had also been given to Larry Johnson and Hilleary Bogley. Fran closed with the appreciation for the hospitality and professionalism that the Board expressed over the years.

Ed Shepard, serving as Acting Assistant Director in Renewable Resources, expressed his desire to lead the program as best as he could. He announced Sally Hampton as the Acting Group Manager for the Wild Horse and Burro Program Washington Office. During the discussion, the Board inquired about the response to their letter to the Director, dated February 14, 2003. Bud Cribley will follow up on the response to the letter.

Elaine Zilenski welcomed the Board to Arizona. She also expressed the appreciation of the hard work of the Board. She highlighted two efforts Arizona had implemented to increase the adoption of burros – the adopt a “Buddy Program” and reduction in fees for jack burros.

Kelly Grissom, Wild Horse and Burro State Lead for Arizona, presented the Arizona Wild Horse and Burro Program. Funding is an issue in the program; however, the state is making efforts to increase adoptions. They are making an effort to reduce their holding time from 90 days to 45 days. The savings in funds will be utilized in additional gathers. To adopt a “Buddy Program”, he emphasized that the program was increasing the number of adoptions and the Bureau was stepping up their compliance efforts. Gelding policy was discussed with its budget implications.

October Minutes

The National Wild Horse and Burros Advisory Board’s October 2002 minutes were approved as amended. The August Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board recommendations and BLM responses will be included in the minutes.

October Recommendations/Responses

Bud Cribley reviewed the October 2002 recommendations:

The National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board developed a list of 11 recommendations at the October 28-29, 2002, meeting in Salt Lake City, UT. The following is the Bureau of Land Management’s (BLM) response to the recommendations and those actions to be taken to implement them.

1. The National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board reaffirms the importance of establishing AML’s as a fundamental element of managing the wild horse and burro program.

The BLM Wild Horse and Burro Program agree with the importance of establishment AML on all HMA’s. This continues to be affirmed in the AWP directives to the field and that the approval process for gathers includes the requirement that AML be established, except in the case of emergencies. The strategy team, lead by Don Simpson, will also recommend that all states with HMA’s, without an established AML, make establishing AML a priority.

2. The National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board recommends BLM complete its FY 2003 national gather plan by January 2003.

The national gather plan has been completed and that it was updated based on adjustment made in the FY 03 AWP. The FY 03 gather schedule has the actual number of animals gathered during the 2003 winter gather season and the potential gathers for the 2003 summer gather season.

3. The National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board recommends that BLM revise, in a timely manner, its current strategy to achieve AML's giving consideration to scenarios such as emergency gathers, drought & fire and report back to the Advisory Board at its next meeting.

The gather team is reviewing the 2000 budget strategy "Living Legends in Balance with the Land," and analyzing the validity of its assumptions. The team has compiled new data on achieving AML and the cost of operation in each state. A preliminary report will be prepared on April 21, 2003, and reviewed by the entire team the week of May 19, 2003. The final report will be sent to the Washington Office by June 2, 2003.

4. The National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board reaffirms the importance of a national marketing program lead.

The list of best-qualified applicants has been forwarded to the Acting, AD-200 for review and interviews. Selection is expected during the month of April.

5. Pursuant to the Advisory Board's previous recommendation that BLM perform an internal analysis of each program element (PE) to identify potential 10% cost savings, the National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board recommends BLM accelerate the evaluation of operational procedures and associated costs prior to March 2003.

The program specialists will be doing detailed analysis of the cost of accomplishing workload measures for each PE. This analysis will include looking at unit cost for work accomplished in each PE by states and comparing that with past year's performance and with other states. This information will be used to identify efficiencies that are occurring and efficiencies that need to be pursued. This information will be use in the formulation of the FY 04 budget and will be completed in early May. From that information the program specialist will be able to identify those areas where improvement can be made and start effecting change.

6. The National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board recommends forming an internal core team, including Bill Higham, to review and update the Strategic Plan by March 2003, for signature by the Director. The Board further recommends that this review include contingencies as well as a mechanism by which to continually determine that the strategy plan is on target.

A team has been pulled together and is in the process of reviewing and updating the WH&B program's Strategic Plan.

7. The National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board recommends BLM issue a statement of commitment, in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding or Cooperative Agreement, to the Wild Horse & Burro Foundation within 60 days.

The BLM agrees that a Memorandum of Understanding needs to be prepared to identify roles and responsibilities between BLM and the National WH&B Foundation. To insure consistency, the Agreement will be finalized when the new Assistant Director for Renewable Resources & Planning, WH&B Group Manager, BLM's National Lead Marketing Specialist, and National WH&B Foundation Director are in place.

8. The National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board recommends the BLM enter into discussions with the Wild Horse & Burro Foundation and other potential partners to accomplish marketing.

BLM has entered into discussions with the National Wild Horse and Burro Foundation for assistance with marketing the program. The BLM also agrees to explore other partnerships to help with marketing.

9. The National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board recommends BLM obtain a formal written opinion from the Solicitor on placing horses or burros outside of the United States for long-term holding and/or sanctuary.

Formal opinion from the Solicitor's Office, on the Sonora Wild Horse Project in Mexico, has been obtained and will be reviewed with the Advisory Board on April 7, 2003.

10. The National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board recognizes the need for integrated program management between the BLM and Forest Service and recommends that Robin Lohnes be a liaison from the Advisory Board to the Forest Service's Wild Horse and Burro Program.

In 1987, BLM and the US Forest Service (USFS) entered into an Interagency Agreement regarding wild horses and burros. A meeting is being scheduled between BLM/USFS for late April to revise the existing Agreement. The new Agreement will address both fiscal and management responsibilities.

11. The National Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board recommends BLM continue to explore and encourage and identify potential private partnerships for achieving all aspects of the program.

The Wild Horse and Burro Program is continuing to explore all potential partnerships in all aspects of the program.

Robin reminded the Bureau that the Board would appreciate a 30-day response to Advisory Board recommendations.

Old Business

The Bureau is in the process of getting an updated list on the population table for 2003 and this list will be available for the June meeting of the Advisory Board. During the discussion, the Bureau will have available an analysis of the cost of the program and recommended actions for the Board's next meeting.

The BLM will select the National Marketing position by the end of April or early May. They had received 12 applicants. Sally Hampton will take the lead on finishing up the list.

The Bureau agreed that the new Group Manager and the Marketing Specialist will work with the Wild Horse and Burro Foundation.

The Education Report will be discussed Tuesday, April 8, 2003.

The Board recommends that the Bureau work closely with the Fish and Wildlife Foundation to utilize its resources within the Wild Horse and Burro Program.

Ed Shepard provide an update for the 2002 nominations, which have not yet been announced. He also spoke about the 2003 nominations. He confirmed that the Federal Registration notice will be out by April 19, 2003 for the 2003 nominations. He provided the status of the personnel vacancies within the Wild Horse and Burro Program. He reiterated that the Group Manager and the Senior Marketing Specialist will be selected at the end of April. He announced the selection of Don Glenn, Senior Wild Horse and Burro Specialist in WO; and Dean Bolstad, as Senior Wild Horse and Burro Specialist in Reno, NV.

Program Updates

Dean Bolstad provided a program update on the 10% operational cost saving. He discussed ongoing efforts by the field to reduce costs. These efforts included timing of gathers to scheduling of adoptions; reducing holding time of horses; stocking up on hay to take advantage of lower prices; protecting the hay from weather in barns; utilizing new security procedures; utilizing more volunteers within the adoption program; more efficiencies in feeding operations and reducing overtime costs by utilizing part-time/temporary employees. He welcomed any recommendations from the Board as to reduction in costs. During the discussion, Robin suggested that the Bureau encourage other states to utilize cost savings procedures as Arizona had implemented. Also during the discussion a Board member suggested that the Board might review its previous recommendations to see if they created inefficiencies in the program.

Gather Plans

Dean Bolstad reviewed the 2003 gather plan and pipeline. He discussed the 2003 gather schedule, analysis of the animals in the adoption pipeline and the facility report. There was a discussion of the criteria utilized in determining the need for emergency gathers and the Board discussed whether or not it should make recommendations in this area. There was also a discussion on how priorities were determined and the Board again discussed if it should make recommendations in this area, too. An alternative method of conducting gathers was discussed. The number of horses in sanctuaries as contrasted with the long-term holding facilities was discussed. Robin expressed concern that the horses in long-term holding facilities would not be considered adoptable.

FY03 and FY04 Funding

Don Glenn reported on the FY03 and FY04 funding. He reviewed a two-page handout reviewing this years annual work plan and state expenditure rate. He reviewed the 2004 budget justification and again stated that 2004 will be a flat budget, which is a reduced budget from 2003 because the Bureau will have to absorb uncontrollable costs. He said that long-term holding is having a significant impact on the budget. The Wyoming Pilot Project was discussed; they needed money up front to start. Large scale adoptions were discussed. The Chickasaw and the Langston proposals were discussed and are hold. It was concluded that at this point in time, the States have adequate funds for their facilities and their planned gathers until the end of the fiscal year. The Rock Springs Wyoming gathers and the additional emergency gathers from other states are not included in the funding. It was noted by Robin that the Board often comes up with recommendations but implementation of these recommendations are often hindered by lack of funding.

Strategic Plan Review

Don Simpson and Bill Higham reviewed their work on the Strategic Plan. He discussed their charge and recommendations. Don highlighted issues; for instance, an analysis of necessary funds to reach AML by 2005, 2007 or 2010 suggested that the Bureau maintain its current strategy to reach AML by 2005. His team will be meeting May 1-4, 2003, to draft their final report. The report will be drafted by mid-May for the Executive Leadership Team meeting. Don wanted the Board to sponsor an external symposium to give feedback on new ideas, "out of the box" ideas. During this discussion, they brought up again the large scale adoptions. Ed Shepard said they will put this forward to the Director and the ELT then to the Board. If the Board has any questions about the plan, they need to get their questions into Don Simpson by the May meeting.

Strategy to Achieve AML

Dean Bolstad reviewed the strategy to get to AML. They will have a meeting the week of April 21, 2003. They will have a final report by June 1, 2003. It will be made available to the Board at their next meeting in June.

Checks and Balances

Ed Shepard provided an update on the checks and balances being implemented. The Bureau continually tracks program activities. It utilizes MIS data and other program information. As problems are raised, the Bureau makes an effort to adjust within or across the program. For instance, the Bureau has shifted funding among the states. In the 2003 work plan, funds were reallocated among the states. As BLM evaluates the Eastern States Office program, a cost analysis will be done.

USDA/BLM MOU

Dean Bolstad reviewed the USDA/BLM statement of work. He discussed the contributions that APHIS has made. The Bureau anticipates evaluating the success in the Statement of Work. The Board discussed making recommendations as to the evaluation and timeline.

Pending Litigation

Don Glenn updated the Board on current and pending litigation. Don will keep the Board abreast of any litigation issues. There was a discussion regarding gathers that had been canceled as a result of litigations, and whether or not these should be reviewed by the National Office. Ed Shepard reviewed and affirmed again that the formal opinion from the Solicitor's Office showed that the BLM is not authorized to contract for a long-term sanctuary to care for animals protected by the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act ("Act") in a foreign country because that would put the animals outside the jurisdiction of the United States. This act would strip the animals of the protection of the Act's criminal penalties.

Adoption Fee

Ron Hall provided an update for changing adoption fees. He stated there is no formal proposal for changing the adoption fee for now. The process for changing fees will take approximately two years and requires a formal rule making.

EIA Update

Ron Hall also provided an EIA update from Utah and stated that the Bureau believes that the problem in Utah is an isolated problem.

Fertility Control

Ron Hall provided a fertility control update. He made some suggestions as to possible strategies the Bureau might utilize. He suggested that BLM utilize PZP 2-year broad-scale application immediately and continue research on the 4-year application. Jay Merriam will be contacted to discuss the PZP.

Public comments began at 4:25 p.m.

Educational Program

The Educational program was discussed. It was noted that the program involving Mark Hunter was probably a missed opportunity due, in part, to the high cost of the program. The Glen Rose Adoption was discussed. The Board felt that it is important to evaluate the adoption to make sure that the funding was well spent. It was noted that any educational program opportunities should be presented to the Group Manager. The Acting Group Manager will follow through on the assessment of costs for these kinds of activities to ensure effective management. The new Marketing Specialist will be providing support, coordination, and analysis for these types of opportunities. Bud Cribley handed out a briefing of the public outreach and marketing activities.

At this point, the Board read the Director's response to the February 14th letter from the Advisory Board. The Director's response reflected her concern for the program and her full support for the Board's activities. A copy will be given to the Board members. The Board appreciates the response.

Recommendations 98-02

There was discussion from the Board about the Board Recommendations on the 1998-2002 table. It was agreed that a systematic review be conducted by the BLM along with the Board. This review will be made when the Group Manager is selected. The preliminary analysis of the recommendation can begin now. Results of the review will be discussed at the next meeting.

Strategic Plan

Bill Higham gave a summary of the Simpson's Team report. The report includes the ideas of how to improve BLM's program effectiveness and updates to the draft strategic plan of December 2000. The Board would like to see an analysis of what it will cost BLM if it does not meet its objective which includes the loss of grazing fees, resource damage, starvation of animals, cost of postponing gathers, and litigation costs. During this discussion, Bud Cribley suggested the need to evaluate the implementation of the strategy and determine if initial assumptions were correct and the strategies are effective.

The Advisory Board inquired as to the status of projected emergency gathers for the summer of 2003. The Board noted that wild horse and burro personnel will participate on a team to determine emergency gathers again this year.

The Board also noted its concern about the Nellis Wild Horse range and the delay in the schedule of the gather.

Additional items were discussed including:

The Advisory Board congratulated the efforts that Arizona made to cut costs to increase efficiencies and allow more gathers. The Board also congratulated the National Wild Horse Association on its recent volunteerism award from BLM.

The Board also requested that the CA BLM office inquire as to the status of the burros adjacent to the Mohave Desert National Park.

The Board would like to receive the minutes within two weeks after each meeting.

The next meeting date was discussed. The meeting is tentatively scheduled for June 16-17, 2003, in Billings, MT. Items for next meeting agenda include:

- Updated Population Table
- Cost Analysis with Recommendations
- Report Strategy to Achieve AML
- Results of Review 1998-2002 Recommendations
- Simpson's Report/Draft Strategic Plan
- Policy/IM on Emergency Gathers
- APHIS/BLM Interagency Agreement Budget Statement
- FDA Exemption
- Sustainability Policy

Meeting adjourned at 3:10 p.m.